DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 448 107 SO 032 366

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TITLE Nontraditional, Nongender Stereotyped Experiences: Do They Make a Difference for Young Women?

PUB DATE 2000-11-00

NOTE 30p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association (Bowling Green, KY, November 15-17, 2000).

PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS Baseball; *Career Choice; *Females; Feminism; *Gender Issues; *Individual Development; Interviews; *Nontraditional Occupations; Oral History; Personal Narratives; Qualitative Research; Sex Role

IDENTIFIERS Collaborative Research; *Life Planning; Professional Sports

ABSTRACT

What impact did a nontraditional work experience have on subsequent life decisions in older women's lives, and what can be learned from these experiences that could have an impact on the educational and career decisions of girls and young women? This paper presents data from a collaborative research project with a group of eight older adult women who shared a unique, nontraditional work experience during their late adolescence and young adulthood as members of the All American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL) between 1943 and 1954. The study was conducted within the traditions of feminist oral history, as described by Reinharz (1992), and of personal narrative or storytelling as described by Heilbrun (1988). The data reveal that this nontraditional experience had a pivotal impact for many of the young women on subsequent life decisions, especially about education and career. Potential implications of these results are explored as related to educational and vocational choices of today's girls and young women. Contains 40 references. (Author/BT)

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Running head: NONTRADITIONAL, NONGENDER STEREOTYPED EXPERIENCES

Nontraditional, Nongender Stereotyped Experiences: Do They Make a Difference for Young Women?

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Paper presented at the

Mid-South Educational Research Association Annual Meeting

November 15-17, 2000

Bowling Green, Kentucky

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Abstract

What impact did a nontraditional work experience have on subsequent life decisions in older women's lives, and what can we learn from these experiences that could have an impact on the educational and career decisions of girls and young women? This paper presents data from a collaborative research project with a group of older adult women who shared a unique, nontraditional work experience during their late adolescence and young adulthood as members of the All American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL) between 1943 and 1954. The data reveal that this nontraditional experience had a pivotal impact for many of them on subsequent life decisions, especially about education and career. Potential implications of these results are explored as related to educational and vocational choices of today's girls and young women.

Research Aims and Questions

An important objective of this research was to engage in research about women's experiences that can provide explanations and applications for women about social phenomena that women want and need (Harding, 1987). As social scientists and educators, we seek an understanding of sociopsychological and cultural forces that shape women's development including educational and career decisions and self -perceptions. At the outset of this project I wondered whether nontraditional, nongender stereotyped experiences in adolescence make a difference in the life choices and self-perceptions of adult women.

Unfortunately, much of the previous research in these areas has focused on the experiences of males and been forced into evaluative categories constructed by men (Miller, 1986). When women's lives have been taken seriously, it typically has been privileged white, middle-class women and young adults or adolescents to which attention was given. This research project was a unique case study of older women who have, until recently, been practically invisible and unstudied. These women chose a unique, nontraditional work experience during late adolescence or young adulthood (1943-1954) as members of the All American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL). The women were typically from working class families.

As I became aware of the AAGPBL, I wondered about this group of women. What stories did they have to tell? What were their subsequent experiences, life decisions, career choices, and self -perceptions? What could we learn from these women that might be relevant to the experiences, decisions, choices, and development of other women?

The answers to these questions were explored through narrative data collected from eight participating women. Personal narratives were an appropriate and sound tool for giving voices to the diversity, values, collaboration, and complexity that feminist research epistemology can offer. With such diversity, we can move beyond the narrow focus and prescribed limits of traditional, patriarchal culture and androcentric developmental theories to develop a holistic view of women's lives. We can create and re-create culture and knowledge within the context of real stories about the real lives of real women.

Literature Review

Commitment to a feminist standpoint epistemology was a guiding focus since the beginning of this project. This theoretical framework places women at the center of a theory of knowledge. It utilizes women to generate scientific questions and evidence, to design research for women, and places the researcher on the same critical plane as the research participants.

Miller (1991) challenged us as feminists, educators, and psychologists to explore theories of human development that encompass and articulate the diversity of women's experiences. The emerging body of literature in feminist developmental psychology (e.g., Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Jordan, Surrey, & Kaplan, 1991; Miller, 1986, 1991; Surrey, 1991) was more relevant to the data analysis and interpretation that I utilized rather than traditional, androcentric, developmental psychology.

The model of achievement-related choices described and expanded by Eccles (1987, 1994) was originally developed by Eccles (Parsons), Adler, Futterman, Goff, Kaczala, and Midgley (cited in Eccles, 1994). This theoretical model identified a variety of psychological and social factors that influence long-range and short-rang achievement goals and behaviors. Eccles emphasized the utility of the model as a choice versus deficit paradigm for explaining some of the gendered educational and vocational decisions made by girls and women.

Women's life roles, career decisions, and sense of self are not created in a vacuum but are framed within the context of social, psychological, and historical factors. These factors are multidimensional, interconnected, and dynamic. Each person experiences a life course characterized by continuity and change.

Although the historical, social, and psychological factors framing the context of women's life decisions and feelings about themselves are multidimensional and dynamic, I will discuss the literature in separate categories of historical, social, and psychological factors.

One of the historical factors relates to the of work for immigrant, working class, and African American women which was much different from the idealized myth of true womanhood. It was only the most affluent groups that could sustain this idealized role of homemaker and woman of leisure. Immigrant, working class, and African American women continued to work both in the public work force and in the home (Andersen, 1988). Women excluded from white, middle-class privilege provided a cheap, available labor force for the mills and factories of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Chester & Grossman, 1990).

As described by Betz and Fitzgerald (1987), this pattern remained much the same until World War II when women were needed to fill the jobs vacated by men entering military service. The idealized myth of true womanhood as a lady of leisure and gender stereotypes of women as frail and weak were temporarily suspended. Women were urged to do their patriotic duty that included performing difficult or dangerous work such as building airplanes and ships or working with explosives.

The post-war period found more women seeking to combine family and paid work. Dual career aspirations were stimulated by the expanded variety of women's work experiences and by an increasing consumer economy (Chester & Grossman, 1990). Since World War II, the number and percentage of women working outside the home continued to increase. As discussed by Betz and Fitzgerald (1987) the 1950s saw one-third of women in the public labor-force. By 1986, nearly two-thirds of all women were working outside the home. Contrary to popular myth, women in the work force was not deviant, but was the norm (Andersen, 1988).

Social factors that defined, usually limiting or restricting, women's experiences included gender-role socialization and expectations, family roles, class, availability of role models, and educational opportunities. Bern and Bern (1976) described the insidious, covert, and unconscious gender-role socialization imbedded in social institutions such as family, school, religion, and government.

Weis (1988) outlined the struggle faced by females to construct a valued private and public identity in a patriarchal culture that reinforced their second-class status in both the home and work place. Solutions to this struggle for a positive identity have tended to be defined by individual responsibility and initiative. Weis proposed the need for collective action by females to successfully challenge patriarchal dominance and achieve the power to negotiate the conditions of their own lives.

Women and other disadvantaged or oppressed groups were subject to stratification or hierarchy of work and the economic benefits of work. In 1959, women earned approximately 59% of what men earned doing the same job (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987). Even with claims to expanded career opportunities and strides in pay-equity, the average woman in 1988 still earned only about 68% of what a man was paid (Bradley, Rudolph, & Kupisch, 1992).

Russo (1981) discussed the pressure of the motherhood mandate as a gender-role expectation for developing a woman's identity or sense of self. The motherhood mandate required that a woman have at least two children (more was better and preferably sons) and that she raise them "well." The woman might be educated, work, and have a social life, but her availability was required so she could meet her children's total needs.

Prior to conforming with the motherhood mandate, a woman was expected to comply with the marriage mandate. A woman must be married by a certain age, typically late adolescence or early 20s, to be a real woman. Her status and roles were defined by marriage and motherhood. This marriage mandate was reinforced by many of the traditional theories in developmental psychology that identified marriage as the critical event or task of a woman's passage into adult.

Although styles of family relationships and parenting roles have changed over the past two of three decades, the cultural expectation and imperative for women to be evaluated as full adults by marrying and having children have not changed. A recent theory of women's development proposed by Bardwick (1980) identified marriage as the critical task of women's adult development.

The psychological factors and framework discussed in this review were concentrated in feminist developmental psychology. Traditional developmental psychology has had a long history of androcentricity, devaluing and labeling females as deviant from the appropriate male norms. Traditional theories of human development have been based on research done with males. Theories such as Erikson's (Erikson, Erikson, & Kivnick, 1986) psychosocial theory, Havighurst's (1972) developmental stages, and Levinson's (Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, & McKee, 1978) stages of a man's life were only a small sample of the typical developmental theories utilized to explain human development.

The emerging body of literature from a feminist psychological development perspective was more related and relevant to a feminist standpoint epistemology that was the research philosophy to which I was committed. The developmental research with women by Bardwick (1980) appeared promising as a women-centered theory of development.

Bardwick's (1980) seasons of a woman's life explored the development of contemporary women in different age-cohorts and identified women's developmental tasks over four phases of life: (a) early adult transition

years, (b) settling down period of second adult life phase, (c) middle adulthood, and (d) age 50 and older. Marriage was identified as the critical accomplishment of the first phase of life and becoming a parent was the essential developmental task of the second.

Professional success in the first and second phases of life typically led to frustration rather than fulfillment for women due to the complexity of coping with multiple relationship and career goals. The third phase, middle adulthood, was the time women refocused on professional accomplishments and achieved increased autonomy and independence. In the fourth phase, women maintained a career focus longer than men with preparation for death, figuratively (e.g., menopause) and literally, as one of the key tasks.

Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) discussed ways in which the development of "voice" and naming one's experience was important to women's growth. Belenky et al. suggested that phases of silence and voice had the feel of a stage-type system, but they stated that the exploration of "any stage-like qualities" would be left to future investigation. Belenky et al. noted that including a widely diverse group of participants was difficult since research data did not produce neat and tidy categories for their analysis and interpretation.

Studying women's development from a non-androcentric perspective was a challenge. As Miller stated (1991), "this is not an easy thing to do, because our whole system of thought, our categories, the eyes with which we see and the ears with which we hear have been trained in a system removed from this activity" (p. 26).

Surrey (1991) provided additional explanation and structure on the "self -in-relation" theory of women's development. Surrey expanded the importance of women's development beyond the traditional considerations of psychology (i.e., intrapsychic and private) to social context and public spheres. This model moved beyond the restrictions and limitations of traditional, androcentric developmental theories and reinforced the multi-dimensional, dynamic, and contextual features of women's development.

The model of achievement-related choices described and expanded by Eccles (1987, 1994) was originally developed by Eccles (Parsons), Adler, Futterman, Goff, Kaczala, and Midgley (cited in Eccles, 1994). From the terminology used by Eccles in subsequent writings, this model was referred to as the Eccles et al. model of achievement related choices throughout the remainder of this document. This theoretical model identified a

variety of psychological and social factors that influence long-range and short-range achievement goals and behaviors.

The model was composed of ten major social and motivational factors. These included expectations of success, subjective task value, individual's goals and general self-schemata, individual's affective memories, individual's interpretations of experience, individual's perceptions, cultural milieu, socializers' beliefs and behaviors, differential aptitudes of individual, and previous achievement-related experiences.

In a more recent article, Eccles (1994) reviewed the model and presented empirical research that supported key elements of the model. Eccles emphasized the utility of the model as a choice versus deficit paradigm for explaining some of the gendered educational and vocational decisions made by girls and women. The focus on choice versus deficit explanations for the achievement-related decisions made by women and the focus on social along with psychological factors for these choices were of particular interest. These features created a potential connection with my commitment to a feminist standpoint epistemology.

Within the past ten years, an emerging body of literature has developed related to the social construction of gender in sport and the potential for a feminist deconstruction-reconstruction of sport to empower women. An important collection of this literature was a special edition (i.e., volume 10) of Women's Studies International Forum (1987) that presented thirteen articles connected with a feminist analysis of sport. Several of the articles incorporated qualitative and quantitative research on the meaning of sport, as competitive or leisure activity, in the lives of women.

Theberge's (1987) paper offered an interim examination of the relationship between sport and women's empowerment using Hartsock's work on feminist historical materialism. Theberge discussed the need to take action that would legitimated women's place in sport and challenge the ideology of women's continued subordination. The author reinforced these changes must occur at personal, group, and institutional levels.

Theberge (1987) noted while sport has been personally empowering to individual women, there must be efforts to support changes within groups and institutions that broaden the definition of sport beyond competition and include more creative aspects of physical activity. The author also emphasized that competition does not

require dehumanization that is prevalent in the male model of sport. Women can be empowered in sport as it is redefined or reconstructed to stress support and cooperation.

Birrell and Richter (1987) conducted a four year ethnographic study of a women's summer recreational softball league using intensive interviews and participant observations. Their investigation focused on how individuals and groups overcame hegemonic ideologies of sport and initiated structures that had personal meaning for them. The researchers selected participants that identified themselves as feminists.

Most of the women participating on the feminist softball teams were actively engaged in deconstructing and reconstructing understandings, structures, and behaviors within their experiences that were consistent with feminist principles. These included having fun and enjoying the activity versus a win-at-all-costs attitude, a sensitivity to friendship and personal safety, transforming hierarchical authority by rotating coaching responsibilities, focusing on players strengths, inclusion and participation of all players, and providing support to one's opponent's versus classifying them as the enemy.

Birrell and Richter (1987) concluded that sport was an area of cultural experience too frequently overlooked as an arena for feminist transformation and empowerment. The formalized, culturally accepted concept of sport as defined by patriarchy and male domination could be redefined so that it was no longer alienating for women.

Blinde, Taub, and Han (1989) explored the possibility of participating in college sport to empower women athletes at the group and societal levels. A group of 24 college female athletes were interviewed. Blinde et al. found that college sport facilitated group empowerment for the women through female bonding and development of group identity and common goals.

Female bonding was an extremely positive factor for the women and was facilitated by shared backgrounds, problems, and stresses as a female athlete. Other women athletes composed the major network of friends and support group for the athletes. The women expressed a sense of connectedness within their shared experiences and shared frustrations.

Group identity and common goals also were important outcomes at the group level. Sport provided a goal-oriented context within which the women athletes formed close ties and a sense of connectedness. These

factors supported greater identification with the group and working toward group goals. Blinde et al. (1989) concluded that these factors promoted the group empowerment of the women and prepared them for being able to advance at a societal level.

As described by Blinde et al. (1989), the women felt that their participation in sport assisted in improving society's perception of women as skilled, competent, and capable. Playing sports highlighted the women's qualities that were valued by society such as assertiveness, confidence, drive, motivation, independence, and persistence. The women believed they served as positive role models for other women and girls.

Blinde et al. (1989) found the women had individual awareness of women's issues but rarely discussed these issues as a group. The women athletes identified the inequities they experiences as athletes but often did not transfer this to other areas of society. The athletes had limited feminist consciousness. Many of the women athletes had negative opinions of feminists and feminism as extremists, lesbians, and anti-men.

Six scholarly works related to the AAGPBL were discovered. The research papers included three master's theses and a doctoral dissertation. Sexton's (1954) doctoral dissertation focused on the AAGPBL as a model by physical educators for developing the abilities of girls with high athletic abilities. The master's thesis by Pieper (1953) incorporated a limited history of the league (19431948), the rules of play, and results of a survey with 100 physical educators comparing the AAGPBL standards with the standards from the National Section on Women's Athletics. Hammer's (1991) master's thesis was the most recently produced academic work. The paper encompassed a brief history of the league, an overview of the game's evolution within the league, and numerous photographs and other graphics.

The key scholarly work for all researchers (academic or popular) was Fidler's (1976) master's thesis. This 300-plus page document provided a comprehensive description and analysis of the league's history, structure, organization, and procedures. The work was comprehensive in its scope and through in its analysis. Fidler (1982) summarized the results of her thesis research in an anthology of women in sports.

A survey study with women from the AAGPBL was conducted by Weiller and Higgs (1994). The exploratory research focused on the connection of women's professional baseball with the roles of women in society during the era of the league (1943-54). In addition to demographic information, the survey was

constructed to elicit information about social, cultural, and economic issues related to the women's roles during the 1940s and 1950s. Weiller and Higgs (1994) found most of the women felt their participation in the league was supported by their families and friends. The women identified strict limitations that were imposed on them including appearance, behavior, curfews, dating, and socializing with members of other teams. Most of the women accepted the limitations and felt these were consistent with the appropriate roles for women and the expectations of the culture of their era.

A review of the literature demonstrated a scarcity of research that integrated social and psychological influences on women's development and was contextualized within a historical framework. Scholars in the area of feminist research and, specifically, feminist psychology have supported the need for research about and for women.

From the emerging feminist developmental psychology literature, the scarcity of studies about women's development, as compared to traditional developmental psychology based on male experiences, necessitated increased research to give a more holistic framework of human versus male development. This need was acutely noted for research that focused on the life experiences and development of older women who too often have been marginalized and disregarded.

For these reasons, I sought to study the developmental paths of older adult women. By investigating the consequent outcomes that this unique experience of participating in the AAGPBL had for these women, I hoped to identify potential factors that could exert a positive impact on the life decisions and development of girls and women for the future.

Methodology

This study was constructed within the traditions of feminist oral history, as described by Reinharz (1992), and of personal narrative or storytelling as described by Heilbrun (1988). These traditions are reflected in works edited by Witherell and Noddings (1991) and the Personal Narratives Group (1989). Reinharz reflected that such "work has always been an important part of the women's movement because it draws women out of obscurity, repairs the historical record, and provides an opportunity for the woman reader and writer to identify with the subject" (p. 126).

Personal narrative and life history traditions offered rich possibilities for exploring how the women in this study coped with society, learned about the effects of departing from cultural traditions, and gained an inside view of their culture (Marshall & Rossman, 1989) and themselves.

Design

The design for this research project was based on the results of a pilot study (Hensley, 1994) completed in May 1993. A qualitative research design, as described by Patton (1990), was employed using focused interviews, life history interviews, qualitative data, and constant comparative analysis. A qualitative design was an appropriate research methodology for this project since the variables were not clearly identified and the research questions addressed a complex inter-relationship of social, psychological, and historical factors. A case study was an appropriate qualitative design since a bounded system (the AAGPBL) was the focus of this project (Merriam, 1988).

Participants

Eight women were selected as key participants in this study. These women represented a variety of background characteristics that were important to the research sample. Purposeful sampling was the preferred method of selecting a variety of research participants, however, availability of participants required that snowball or chain sampling also be used.

Data Sources

Data sources consisted of audiotape cassettes of participant interviews, audiotape cassettes of fieldnotes, audiotape cassettes of journal notes, coded verbatim interview transcripts, coded participant feedback, documents and other artifacts, completed participant questionnaires, computer diskettes of raw data, and diskettes of coded data from using The Ethnograph (Seidel, Kjolseth, & Seymour, 1988) computer software program.

Data Collection Procedures

Initial interviews with the participants were conducted between January 1993 and August 1993. All interviews were recorded on audiotape cassettes, and verbatim transcripts were produced for each interview. Initial interview transcripts with additional questions, reflections, and analytic memos were delivered to each

participant. All participants returned the initial transcripts with additional feedback which included corrections, additions, and responses to researcher reflections.

Participant observations were conducted throughout the research project, however, the bulk of observations were focused within the five days of the AAGPBL 50th Anniversary during August 1993. Detailed fieldnotes were recorded on audiotape cassettes at periodic intervals and at the conclusion of each event. Fieldnotes were reviewed, transcribed, and coded.

Documents and other pertinent artifacts were collected from five key sources: the AAGPBL archives at the Northern Indiana Historical Society, archives at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, and personal archives of three participant women. Relevant data from the artifacts were extracted, coded, and analyzed for categories and patterns to confirm or disconfirm the data obtained from participant observations and focused interviews.

Data Analysis Procedures

A first level of data analysis was accomplished while transcribing the audiotape recordings of the interviews and continued as the verbatim transcripts were prepared for the participants. A second level of analysis ensued from utilizing The Ethnograph (Seidel et al., 1988). Data from the women's narratives were analyzed using the Eccles (Parsons), Adler, Futterman, Goff, Kaczala, and Midgley model of achievement-related choices (cited in Eccles, 1994) and the self -in-relation model of women's development (Jordan et al., 1991; Surrey, 1991).

An adaptation of grounded theory methodology developed as I constructed and refined the conceptual categories that I was using during the analysis of the data. Grounded theory had its foundational beginnings with Glaser and Strauss (1967). It was elaborated by Strauss and Corbin (1990) and others. As explained by Merriam (1988), one strategy for developing theory from case study data was the grounding the theory in the data and allowing it to emerge or unfold from them-using grounded theory.

Constructing categories by continuously comparing one data segment or narrative event to another was the first step in my use of a ground theory approach to the data. The next level, as articulated by Merriam (1988) was to define each categories by its properties.

According to Merriam (1988), hypotheses were the other element of theories, and hypotheses suggest links or bridges between concepts and properties. Some beginning links were made between the categories and properties that identify the directions/forms the women's lives took and the feelings/perceptions they had about themselves after playing in the AAGPBL.

Results

Analysis and interpretation of the data revealed that participation in a nontraditional work experience (the AAGPBL) had an impact on the women's subsequent life decisions and development. All of the participants felt that playing in the AAGPBL had a positive influence in their lives.

Expanded Role Models

The women told how playing in the league presented them with unimagined opportunities and unique role models within and outside the AAGPBL. These experiences helped the women identify possibilities in the areas of education, occupation, and relationships which many of them had never before considered. Some of the women such as Peg experienced a variety of role models which brought wide degree of openness and flexibility to their awareness. Peg reflected:

> Well, like I say, had I not gone out and pursued this career [in the AAGPBL], I would not have met people in different walks of life. I don't think that [I] probably would have stayed in my own little shell. And it [was] just that there were so many opportunities out there. What I really had to do after I finished playing was decide which one of those I wanted to pursue (2-1 r-1, 110-119).

Peg elaborated that her participation with the AAGPBL assisted her in developing the determination to pursue the alternatives presented by role models. Peg added:

> I was very much of a home-body person, and I did love the farm. And who knows, I might have even wound up marrying a farm-boy. But once I got out and met people and got to seeing what there really was out there and how far you could really go if you set your mind to it (2-1 a- 1, 79-86).

AAGPBL as Pivotal Experience

For many of the women, participating in the AAGPBL was the defining experience for their subsequent life course. The women related how their experiences in the league presented them with unexpected possibilities which positively affected life course decisions and self-perceptions.

The pivotal nature of participating in the AAGPBL was clearly identified by Bess. At the time she was recruited into the league, Bess was earning $.50 an hour picking cotton in northern Texas. There were few, if any, job opportunities in her area, and Bess felt the prospects for improving her career or economic situation were bleak. Bess identified what playing in the league meant to her.

> And it's a miracle that I even, you know, heard about the league. It's a miracle that I even went down to the grocery store and read the sports.... So really the All American Girls Baseball League really changed my life and made it what it is today (6-1 a, 158-167).

Participation in the league by Bess had clear and immediate effect on her aspirations after leaving the AAGPBL. Bess reflected, "Six years experience [with the league]--after ball, I knew I must have a profession and that I could and did do it" (6-1b, 68-71).

After her experiences in the league, Bess attended technical school and developed a successful career in the medical field. She described the effects the league had on her selfperceptions.

> When I say baseball did everything for me, it's true. Possibly I would still be in Riley, Texas, which isn't a bad place to live if you have a profession and can drive some place to work. At the time [leaving to play in the AAGPBL], I had nothing, and now I feel satisfied with my life, and I am a happy person (6-Doc2, 47-50).

Effects of Playing in AAGPBL on Education

Most of the women described how playing in the AAGPBL had influenced them to continue their education. Almost all of the participant women pursued some form of post-secondary education after playing in the league. Several of the women finished college. After completing an undergraduate degree, some of the women pursued advanced studies.

Most of the women did not perceive higher education as an option available to them until they participated in the AAGPBL. Financial issues were significant for many of the women. They and their families

did not have the resources to support higher education as a realistic choice. Earnings from the league offered many of them the opportunity to afford college. In addition, their experiences in the league frequently provided role models of women who had completed or were involved in higher education.

Before participating in the AAGPBL, Peg had not seriously considered going to college because her family did not have the resources to finance this choice. Peg talked about the impact of her league experiences on altering this choice.

> I think it was one of the greatest experiences I could have ever asked for. Because it did certainly opened up a lot of windows and doors for me, and it also, I think, encouraged me to go on and go to school, which before I played ball, I really did not want to go to college. I just--high school was all I ever wanted; that was plenty. But then when I got out and saw the opportunities that there were and what you were going to have to do to further yourself in the world, I knew that education was the next step for me. And so really, I think that baseball was very influential in moving me on to where I am today (2-1r-1, 86-103).

After leaving the AAGPBL, Peg attended a local university and completed an undergraduate degree in zoology. She also finished the coursework for a master's program in experimental medicine.

Helen's educational path was more circuitous, but it was no less influenced by her participation in the league than Peg' had been. Several years after leaving the league, Helen reassessed the direction she wanted to take in her life and realized that her experiences in the AAGPBL had a significant impact on her interests. Helen explained:

> I think it (playing in the league) really influenced me to work with children. I wanted to work with children so I thought, "Well, how do I go about this?" And then all of a sudden, I thought, "It's about time you stopped playing and settled down. So that meant go [back] to school (4-1a, 405-412).

Helen described the route she took to fulfill her aspirations.

> Then I went to school. Well, I went to the Kalamazoo-Battle Creek Normal School for two years, that's a teachers college, and then I went to the university for a year and a half. I got my degree and started teaching (4-1 r, 349-360).

She continued as an elementary educator for almost 20 years. Helen felt she had found a rewarding career teaching second, third, and fourth grades in her adopted home of Kalamazoo.

Effects of League on Career

In addition to the educational possibilities, the women also commented that participating in the league helped build their confidence and self-assurance, helped them mature, and introduced them to a range of occupational role models and choices. The participants typically described a balance of occupational roles and relationships as defining their primary identity. Most of the women developed nontraditional careers, acquired material resources, and achieved social mobility subsequent to playing in the league.

Research data from a wide variety of sources (e.g., literature relevant to the AAGPBL, participant interviews, archival materials, participant observations) revealed the women of the AAGPBL operated within a wide variety of roles and careers ranging from automobile assembly-line workers to physicians and airplane pilots. As Mae observed,

> It's an impressive list of what the former players did after retiring from the AAGPBL including doctors, lawyers, lots of teachers, medical technicians, and electricians. Need to remember this was the late 1940s and early 1950s, and this just wasn't done (11 -1 a, 1075-1082).

Most of the women who participated in this research eventually pursued nontraditional careers. Several of the women such as Helen, Emily, Maggie, Mae, and Adele initially obtained secretarial/clerical or teaching positions, traditional female occupations, after leaving the AAGPBL. With further education or on-the-job experience, many advanced their careers along more nontraditional paths. Emily described her employment frustrations and the actions she took to change her career path.

> Well, after I left the league I went to work for a concern; they were a wholesale building outfit. I took a secretarial position with them. And the more I thought about it, (sighs) I thought, "Gee, I can't spend," --because I wasn't married--"I can't spent the rest of my life [writing]: Thank you for your order of such and such date. We require. We're sorry we're out of such and such. We'll have to back order it. I can't do that." So somebody told me about paralegals, you know, legal assisting. So they were starting a night class at one of the evening school--adult schools, and so I enrolled it that.... I stuck with it, and I went

> through a regular tuition college strictly for paralegals. I'd go nights and work days, and trudge through all this. Got my skills built up, took the State exam, passed it. I became an official paralegal for the court system down in San Diego (7-1 a, 294-328).

Her experiences in the AAGPBL inspired Emily to pursue a more nontraditional career that she found more exhilarating and fulfilling than a traditional clerical position.

Emily felt continued satisfaction with her decision to shift from doing a job to having a career. With the economic security and mobility nourished by her occupation, Emily was able to invest in real estate located around a resort town north of San Diego. She moved to the area so she could "breathe fresh air and be able to play golf" while maintaining her career.

> I became an official legal assistant in Orange County courts which is where I am now. That's where I retired from.... But at least my life wasn't dull after baseball. Because after all the action we had playin' ball and stuff and had to go back to some humpty-dumpty thing, it wasn't good. The legal assisting filled the bill (7-1a, 343-352).

Even after 11 years of retirement, Emily expressed a keen enthusiasm for the career she had chosen. She related, "So much action, playing baseball convinced me to get into some interesting field. This is where I undertook to become a paralegal. And most interesting it has been!" (7-1 b, 60-64).

Positive Self-Perceptions/Agency

The women expressed positive self-perceptions that developed within the context of their experiences with the AAGPBL. Typically, the women associated their experiences in the league with fostering self-confidence, decision-making skills, and risk-taking. The women frequently described themselves as backward, shy, timid, or reserved before participating in the AAGPBL. As related by Helen, "I came out of my shell and became a much more out-going person. At age 68 I still have a good sense of humor" (4-1 b, 236-238).

An increased sense of self-confidence from experiences in the league was repeated by Jenny. "I think I became much more out-going, confident, and knew what goals I wanted to achieve" (3-1 b, 141 -143). Jenny elaborated on the transition that occurred during her AAGPBL career.

> When I joined the league I was very shy and quiet as I was overwhelmed with being out amongst so many people.... After a couple of years, I started to play regularly and gained more confidence and made friends and began enjoying meeting people. I learned so much from our travels and how to cope with any situation (3-1c, 23-39).

Jenny noted her continued growth and development in a sense of confidence as she moved and changed team assignments throughout her years with the league.

> Well, I think that after playing and after being moved around a lot I think it made you feel as though you could speak out just a little bit more, you know. By the time I got done with the league, and moving around and getting around in the world, I felt like I could talk to anybody and whatever. If I wanted to say something, I said it and so forth. Where I wouldn't have done that when I started. So it does, it makes a difference in your personality and how you grow (3-la-1, 441-454).

Connectedness: Development of Self and Others

The women's self -perceptions developed within the context of relationships and were measured by a standard of relationships--an ethic of caring, nurturance, and responsiveness. The development of competencies in various domains were described by the participants as important to their self -perceptions.

Most of the women emphasized the impact of league experiences on expanding their understanding of and relationship to different kinds of people. Jenny reflected about the dynamic impact that playing in the league had in her life.

> If I had never left home, I would only see and think of [the] way things are said and done in Battle Creek. By being with so many different people and having these different experiences, you have a broader outlook on life (3-1b, 152-157).

Adele also noted the broader understanding of people that she gained from participating in the AAGPBL. Adele stated, "It (playing in the AAGPBL) made a person realize the different kinds of personalities that you encountered and learn to accept them just as they were because you run up against an awful lot of different types of people" (8-1a, 340-345).

Maggie reiterated the feeling of acceptance that was identified by Adele, and she also emphasized a sense of mutual respect. Maggie commented:

> Well, it's (playing in the league) taught me to [have] respect for other people--their way of thinking as opposed to mine, and I don't inflict my way of thinking and they don't inflict their way of thinking. It was a mutual respect, and it all boils down to what I said in the beginning it's just the meeting of people and getting along with them and accepting them as they are, they accept me as I am. I think mutual respect is a great, great thing (5-1 a, 483-494).

The theme of feeling that one became more accepting and understanding also was reflected by Emily. "It [experience in the league] made me more understanding of people, which in turn helped me to try to maintain outlook and attitude factors" (7-1b, 115-118). In addition she commented that this feeling for and about others gave her an awareness of herself and her own development.

The sense of enjoyment and appreciation were evident in Emily's tone and manner of speech as I listened, again, to her describe the growth and development she observed in others during their experiences with the AAGPBL. Emily recalled,

> We had the ability to play ball just like the fellows, and to me, that was one way of expressing ourselves--by playing in the league.... There were a lot of people who came into the league as introverts, and they were bashful. I never have been I might add; more or less I'm an extrovert. But I mean it was fun seeing people come along in the years that I played with them, and that was satisfaction (7-1a, 413-437).

Enjoying Life

For many years, these women felt that their experiences and accomplishments in the AAGPBL were of little lasting interest or importance to others. They packed up their memorabilia and their memories, and, as Bess explained, "We didn't talk about our baseball experiences for years because some people didn't believe it or weren't interested. [We] Just went about our job, but when you ran into a few fans who remembered, a good conversation was had by all" (6-1 b, 47-53).

As discussed by Heilbrun (1988), these women have experienced the power and energy generated in naming and reclaiming the stories of their experiences. Mae's comments illustrated this energy as she related:

> I didn't know that I could talk this much, but you should hear us when we get together. There's such a rapport and good feeling. It's something that we did years ago that we love to talk about it. It's probably something that we've had inside us all these years. It finally got out, and now nobody shuts up (1-5a, 1060-1068).

Many of the women feel a sense of excitement about being rediscovered, and they are enjoying their celebrity status as reflected by Mae's comments: "The fun we are having in our senior years is unbeatable. We are so fortunate to be able to join in all the excitement and enjoyment connected with our association (AAGPBL Players Association) and the release of the movie" (1-5b, 385-391).

Most of the women expressed a feeling of appreciation in the league being rediscovered and in their achievements being recognized. In the context of asking Mae about what the movie, "A League of Their Own," and the publicity about the AAGPBL have meant to her, Mae explained:

> It's good to be appreciated. We played because we liked it. We didn't know what we had, and now people are asking questions. It gives you a good feeling to think that it's important enough that somebody wants to listen. That's a good feeling (1 -3a-1, 976-982).

Many of the women commented the feeling of appreciation involved not only being recognized by others but also a sense of self -appreciation.

Maggie articulated a beautifully, poetic philosophy of life, friendship, and connection in response to my question: "What was the most important thing for you about your experiences in the AAGPBL?" Maggie replied:

> It was just the love of the action, the traveling. As I say, it comes right down to meeting people. People is what it's all about. You know, there's nothing else.... So you have to get along with people, like them, attempt to have them like you, and go along. I don't mean with the flow of the crowd to be a puppet or anything but just be agreeable and help each other out. That's what life is all about, helping each other and getting along. You see, there's nothing else, only people (5-1 a, 965-983).

Discussion

Reflections on Patterns of Development

In reflecting on the unique components of my research participants' experiences in the AAGPBL, I was struck with the sense of how unusual their experience may have been. One of the most unique components may have been that these women participated in an achievement-related activity that emphasized and required group participation, group cooperation within a competitive environment, and the building of group relationships.

The women came to the AAGPBL as adolescents and young adults, and this was often a pivotal time in the women's personal development. The organization of the league in many ways mirrored the structure of the traditional family. The managers and league officials acted in a fatherlike capacity, and chaperons fulfilled a mother-like role. During their AAGPBL careers, most of the women lived with host families in their teams' home cities.

Within this family-like structure of the AAGPBL, the women developed connections and friendships with other women that were powerful and empowering. Most of the women talked about the strength of the relationships they formed while playing in the league, especially with teammates who became "like sisters." Teammates and chaperons became mentors, role models, and friends to one another. They encouraged and supported each others' vision and development as individuals and as a group working together for common goals. They experienced achievement and public recognition not only for their individual accomplishments but also for their achievements as a group, a team effort.

Certainly selected other women who were age-cohorts of the participant women experienced similar levels of public recognition and celebrity status that these women achieved. The activities that framed other women's experiences of fame and recognition were, however, typically individual or solo endeavors. Such activities were often athletic events such as tennis, golf, track and field competitions or feats like flying an airplane and swimming the English Channel or occurrences such as being elected to a political office.

This launched my reflections on the incredible power of women's relational networks and led me to return to the research findings about the effects that playing in the AAGPBL had on the women's feeling about themselves. The most universal themes expressed by the women related to their sense of increased confidence in

themselves, feelings of success as they achieved individual and group goals they had set, and having a sense of connection to and involvement with others.

The strength of these thematic categories seemed to be established or grounded in being neither exclusively achievement-oriented nor completely relationship-oriented but being both achievement- and relationship-oriented. This sense of the power of women acting or engaging as a group was supported in the research done by Birrell and Richter (1987) and Blinde et al. (1994). The empowerment of women within a group structure or process encompassed the valuing and nurturing of individual women and of the group.

Playing in the AAGPBL reinforced and expanded many of the childhood capacities that most of the women brought to their participation in the league. They had not experienced rigid gender role socialization as youngsters. Many of the women had been actively encouraged, and others were not prohibited or restricted, in developing instrumental (traditionally masculine) attributes along with expressive (traditionally feminine) qualities. These women were independent, active, competitive, direct, ambitious, confident, and strong while also displaying kindness, tact, creativity, tenderness, understanding, and gentleness. As older adults, they continued to exhibit a full range of human characteristics or traits.

Implications for Females in the 21st Century

What can we glean from these women's narratives that may be applicable to the developmental needs and life experiences of girls and women for the future? How do we move beyond the boundaries of "appropriate" female educational and career choices prescribed by a patriarchial tradition? We must actively seek out and support opportunities for girls and women to come together in small and large groups as colleagues, friends, collaborators--sisters. We must become mentors, role models, and "other mothers" or "other sisters" for women and girls in identifying and exploring a wide range of goals and life choices. We must be open and sincerely willing to share ourselves--our experiences, our stories, our successes, our failures--with each other. I/we must ask and give an honest answer to the question: Am I (are we) willing to support and celebrate the accomplishments of another woman or girl that might surpass my own (our own) achievements?

It is likely that many of us been approached on numerous occasions by various groups to share our skills, our knowledge, and our experience with other women and girls related to their educational and career decisions. I

have to ask myself the question: How many community groups, church organizations, or school clubs have I sought out to offer my support? How many networks for girls and women have I helped to organize or maintain? Do I/we then offer "the same old" traditional, gender stereotyped experiences and choices or do I/we go beyond options that are personally and culturally comfortable and familiar?

The educational and career decisions that girls and women face for the 21st century most likely will become more diverse and complex. How might this research with women who played in the AAGPBL inform the academic and vocational challenges for the future? The participant women related that they had less rigid gender-role socialized as youngsters, and they had been encouraged to develop instumental as well as expressive characteristics. In and through their experiences with the AAGPBL, they met role models and mentors who introduced them to nontraditional educational and career possibilities.

What connection did playing professional baseball in the 1940s and 1950s have with going to college and becoming an engineer, a doctor, a teacher, a physician's assistant, or a paralegal? As summarized by one of the participants, Mae:

> Before I played in the AAGBBL, I worked in the factory running drill presses and lathes doing war work. I might have stayed on after the war not knowing that I could become involved in engineering. I had taken shorthand and typing in high school but had no desire to spend my life doing either. I think I found out that girls could do some things outside the accepted realm (1 -5b, 227-237).

The experience of participating in the league revealed new educational and vocational options to these women. For the 21st century, the avenues that expand academic and career choices to girls and women may be sport or computer technology or summer mentorship.

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